Natural Resources and Environmental Issues

Volume 7 *University Education in Natural Resources*

Article 56

1998

New master of natural resources professional degree program at Utah State University

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A NEW MASTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES PROFESSIONAL DEGREE PROGRAM AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: The Utah State University College of Natural Resources has recently instituted an inter-departmental, non-thesis Master of Natural Resources degree to meet the needs of students and practicing professionals with a career orientation in natural resource management as opposed to research.

The degree program consists of 30 semester credits in three categories: (1) courses in specified topical areas that make up a minimum of 18 semester credits, (2) 9 semester credits of course work based on an individual student's career goals; and (3) a capstone problem-solving exercise that includes writing a substantial report. To fulfill the first category, students are required to take a new course in Ecosystem Management that emphasizes the integration of bio-physical, socio-economic, and human values in natural resource management; and one course each in five topical areas among nine options that include: policy and administration, economics, human dimensions, business, ecology, quantitative methods, physical environment, information management, and communications. Students with an undergraduate degree in a major other than one of the traditional natural

resources majors (e.g., fisheries and wildlife, rangeland resources, forest resources) will be required to make up deficiencies in undergraduate preparation prior to beginning MNR degree course work.

Oversight for the MNR degree is provided by an associate or assistant dean who chairs an MNR Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from each of the four departments in the college. This committee provides guidance on policy and curricula. Guidelines for application to and matriculation in the MNR degree program are the same as for other graduate degree programs in the college, starting with the Graduate School and moving to individual departments where students reside along with their major professor. As with other degree programs, students have an advisory committee chaired by their major professor.

Our analysis indicates that a shifting of natural resource management away from the traditional commodity orientation toward a broader concept that incorporates the principles of ecosystem management, positions the MNR degree to better meet the needs of natural resource managers than the traditional (mostly research-oriented) MS degrees in natural resources, especially in light of the recent shift in professional training from the undergraduate to the graduate level. Monitoring of enrollments and placement of graduates over the ensuing years will provide a test of this argument.